

# *News from the Wyoming Department of Health*

Thursday, March 5, 2009

## **Wyoming Celebrates Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month**

A Wyoming Department of Health program is encouraging colorectal cancer screening for Wyoming residents and providing a free colonoscopy for some who otherwise might not be able to afford it.

Colorectal cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer death in Wyoming and affects both men and women. According to Dr. Brent Sherard, Wyoming Department of Health director and state health officer, most colon cancer cases begin as benign, pre-cancerous polyps and removing polyps early can prevent colon cancer. "Colorectal cancer is really one of the most common and serious cancers we deal with, but is such a treatable disease if picked up early," he said.

Authorized in 2007, the Wyoming Cancer Control Act included funding for the Wyoming Colorectal Cancer Early Detection Program (WCCEDP). The program pays colonoscopy costs for residents who qualify based on age, income and lack of insurance coverage.

Wanda Webb, WCCEDP case manager, said "More than one-third of colorectal cancer deaths could be avoided if people over the age of 50 had regular screening tests."

Over the past year the program has processed more than 1,000 applications and reimbursed providers for 550 colonoscopies. Of those colorectal cancer screens completed, polyps were removed in 45 percent of patients. Eight colon cancers have been identified to date by the program.

A few months ago, the fiancé of Torrington resident Margaret Hauf was diagnosed with late-stage colon cancer during a hospitalization for another illness. He had never been screened for colon cancer and faces chemotherapy to fight the disease. A spot has also been identified on his lung.

Her fiancé's experience prompted 60-year-old Hauf to get herself screened for colon cancer. "I couldn't afford the procedure, but the state program made it possible for me to let go of that worry and focus on my health."

"I had the procedure done 30 years ago when they didn't use any form of anesthesia, so the thought of going back was not top on my list," Hauf continued. "Medicine has come a long way. The colonoscopy procedure was pain free and I felt safe."

The doctor removed two pre-cancerous polyps from Hauf's colon. "I had no symptoms and no pain, so this came as a complete surprise to me," she said. "But they removed the polyps and I am going to be fine." Over time, she was told she would have developed cancer.

Hauf wants to help spread the word about the importance of early detection. “I tell everyone who comes into my workplace, if you are over 50 or have a family member who’s had colon cancer, you need to get screened. Don’t be afraid of the unknown.”

This year, to celebrate colorectal cancer awareness month and the importance of screening, the program is implementing the 2009 Pledge to Screen for Colorectal Cancer. All Wyoming men and women over age 50 are encouraged to take the pledge. Additionally, those who have a family history of the disease are encouraged to visit with their provider about screening before age 50.

For more information about free colonoscopy, or to pledge to screen, contact Gina Lujan at (866-205-5292), or [gina.lujan@health.wyo.gov](mailto:gina.lujan@health.wyo.gov). Applications for the screening program are available online at <http://health.wyo.gov/phsd/ccp/app.html>.

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